



WHISPERING SMITH

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SYNOPSIS:

Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called out to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek. McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage buried. McCloud became acquainted with Dickie Dunning, a girl at the west, who came to look at the wreck.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"From the divide it looked like a mountain on fire. I'm sorry Mr. Sinclair is not here."

"Why, indeed, yes, so am I."

"Because I know him. You are one of his men, I presume."

"Not exactly, but is there anything I can do—"

"Oh, thank you, nothing, except that the pretty girl who has sent over to us has sprung his shoulder."

"He will be sorry to hear it, I'm sure."

"But we are doing everything possible for him. He is going to make a perfectly lovely horse."

"And whom may I say the message is from?" Though disconcerted, McCloud was regaining his wits. He felt perfectly certain there was no danger, if she knew Sinclair and lived in the mountains, but that she would sometimes find out he was not a conductor. When he asked his question she appeared slightly surprised and answered easily: "Mr. Sinclair will know it is from Dickie Dunning."

McCloud knew her then. Every one knew Dickie Dunning in the high country. This was Dickie Dunning of the great Crawling Stone ranch, most widely known of all the mountain ranches. While his stupidity in not guessing her identity before overhauled him, he resolved to exhaust the last effort to win her interest.

"I don't know just when I shall see Mr. Sinclair," he answered, gravely, "but he shall certainly have your message."

A doubt seemed to steal over Dickie at the change in McCloud's manner. "Oh, pardon me—I thought you were working for the company."

"You are quite right, I am; but Mr. Sinclair is not."

Her eyebrows rose a little. "I think you are mistaken, agent you?"

"It is possible I am; but if he is working for the company, it is pretty certain that I am not," he continued, heaping mystification on her. "However, that will not prevent my delivering the message. By the way, may I ask which shoulder?"

"Shoulder?"

"Which shoulder is sprung?"

"Oh, of course! The right shoulder, and it is sprung pretty badly, too, Cousin Lance says. How very stupid of me to ride over here for a freight wreck!"

McCloud felt humiliated at having nothing better worth while to offer. "It was a very bad one," he ventured.

"But not of the kind I can be of any help at, I fear."

McCloud smiled. "We are certainly short of help."

Dickie brought her horse's head around. She felt again of the girl as she replied: "Not such as I can supply, I'm afraid." And with the words she stepped away, as if preparing to mount.

McCloud intervened. "I hope you won't go away without resting your horse. The sun is so hot. Mayn't I offer you some sort of refreshment?"

Dickie Dunning thought not.

"The sun is very warm," persisted McCloud.

Dickie smothered her gauntlet in the assured manner natural to her. "I am pretty well used to it."

But McCloud held on. "Several cars of fruit were destroyed in the wreck. I can offer you any quantity of grapes—crates of them are spilling over there—and pears."

"Thank you, I am just from lunch."

"And I have cooled water in the car. I hope you won't refuse that, so far out in the desert."

Dickie laughed a little. "Do you call this far? I don't; and I don't call this desert by any means. Thank you ever so much for the water, but I'm not in the least thirsty."

"It was kind of you even to think of extending help. I wish you would let me send some fruit over to your ranch. It is only spilling here."

Dickie stroked the neck of her horse. "It is about 15 miles to the ranch house."

"I don't call that far."

"Oh, it isn't," she returned, hastily, professing not to notice the look that came into the words, "except for perfectly things!" Then, as if acknowledging her disadvantage, she added, swinging her horse's head around: "I am under obligations for the offer, just the same."

"At least, won't you let your horse drink?" McCloud threw the force of an appeal into his words, and Dickie stopped her preparations and appeared to waver.

"Jim is pretty thirsty, I suppose. Have you plenty of water?"

"A tender full. Had I better lead him down while you fall up on the hill in the shade?"

"Can't I ride him down?"

"It would be pretty rough riding."

"Oh, Jim goes anywhere," she said, with her attractive indifference to situations. "If you don't mind helping me mount."

"With pleasure."

She stood waiting for his hand and McCloud stood, not knowing just what to do. She glanced at him expectantly. The sun grew intensely hot.

"You will have to show me how," he stammered at last.

"Don't you know?"

He mentally cursed the technical education that left him helpless at such a moment, but it was useless to pretend. "Frankly, I don't."

"Just give me your hand. Oh, not in that way! But never mind, I'll walk," she suggested, catching up her skirt.

"The rocks will cut your boots all to pieces. Suppose you tell me what to do this once," he said, assuming some confidence. "I'll never forget."

"Why, if you will just give me your hand for my foot, I can manage, you know."

He did not know, but she lifted her skirt gracefully, and her crushed boot rested easily for a moment in his hand. She rose in the air above him before he could well comprehend. He felt the quick spring from his supporting hand, and it was an instant of exhilaration. Then she balanced herself with a flushed laugh in the saddle, and he guided her ahead among the loose rocks, the horse nosing at his elbow as they picked their way.

Crossing the track, they gained better ground. As they reached the switch and passed a box car, Jim shied, and Dickie spoke sharply to him. McCloud turned.

In the shade of the car lay the tramp.

"That man lying there frightened him," explained Dickie. "Oh," she exclaimed, suddenly, "he has been hurt!" She turned away her head. "Is that the man who was in the wreck?"

"Yes."

"Do something for him. He must be suffering terribly."

"The men gave him some water awhile ago, and when we moved him into the shade we thought he was dead."

"He isn't dead yet!" Dickie's face, still averted, had grown white. "I saw him move. Can't you do something for him?"

She reined up at a little distance. McCloud bent over the man a moment and spoke to him. When he rose he called to the men on the track.

"You are right," he said, rejoicing Dickie; "he is very much alive. His name is Wickwire; he is a cowboy."

"A cowboy?"

"A tramp cowboy."

"What can you do with him?"

"I'll have the men put him in the caboose and send him to Barnhart's hospital at Medicine Bend when the engine comes back. He may live yet. If he does, he can thank you for it."

CHAPTER IV.

George McCloud.

McCloud was an exception to every tradition that goes to make up a mountain railroad man. He was from New England, with a mild voice and a hand that roughened very slowly. McCloud was a classmate of Morris Blood's at the Boston Tech, and the acquaintance began there continued after the two left school, with a scattering fire of letters between the mountains and New England, as few and as far between as men's letters usually scatter after an ardent school acquaintance.

There were just two boys in the McCloud family—John and George. One had always been intended for the church, the other for science. Somehow the boys got mixed in their cradles, and John got into the church. For George, who ought to have been a clergyman, nothing was left but a long engineering course for which, after he got it, he appeared to have no use.

However, it seemed a little late to shift the life alignments. John had the pulpit and appeared disposed to keep it, and George was left, like a New England farm, to wonder what had become of himself.

It is, nevertheless, odd how matters come about. John McCloud, a prosperous young clergyman, stopped on a California trip at Medicine Bend to see brother George's classmate and something of a real western town. He saw nothing sensational—it was there, but he did not see it—but he found both hospitality and gentlemen, and, if surprised, was too well-bred to admit it. His one-day stop ran on to several days. In leaving John McCloud, in a seventh heaven of enthusiasm over the high country, asked Morris Blood why he could not find something for George out there; and Blood, not even knowing the boy wanted to come, wrote for him, and asked Bucks to give him a job. Possibly, being over-solicitous, George was nervous when he talked to Bucks; possibly the impression left by his big, strong, bluff brother John made against the boy; at all events, Bucks, after he talked with George, shook his head. "I could make a first-class railroad man out of the preacher, Morris, but

not out of the brother. Yes, I've talked with him. He can't do anything but figure elevations, and, by heaven, we can't feed our own engineers here now." So George found himself stranded in the mountains.

Morris Blood was cut up over it, but George McCloud took it quietly. "I'm no worse off here than I was back there, Morris." Blood, at that, plucked up courage to ask George to take a job in the Cold Springs mines, and George jumped at it. It was impossible to get a white man to live at Cold Springs after he could save money enough to get away, so George was welcomed as assistant superintendent at the Number Eight mine, with no salary to speak of and all the work.

One day, coming down "special" from Bear Dance, Gordon Smith, who bore the nickname Whispering Smith, rode with President Bucks in the privacy of his car. The day had been long, and the alkali lay light on the desert. The business in hand had been canvassed, and the troubles put aside for chicken, coffee and cigars, when Smith, who did not smoke, told the story of something he had seen the day before at Cold Springs that pleased him.

The men in the Number Eight mine had determined to get rid of some Italians, and after a good deal of rowing had started in to catch one of

tion of the men, and leashed him across the table with his tongue until the blacksmith opened fire on him with his revolver. McCloud all the while shaking his finger at him and abusing him like a pickpocket. "The crowd couldn't believe its eyes," Gordon Smith concluded, "and McCloud was pushing for the blacksmith with his cue, when Kennedy and I squirmed through to the front and relieved the tension. McCloud wasn't hit."

"What is that mining man's name?" asked Bucks, reaching for a message clip.

"McCloud."

"First name?" continued Bucks, mechanically.

"George."

Bucks looked at his companion in surprise. Then he spoke, and a feeling of self-abasement was reflected in his words. "George McCloud," he echoed. "Did you say George? Why, I must know that man. I turned him down once for a job. He looked so peaceable I thought he was too soft for us." The president laid down his cigar with a gesture of disgust. "And yet there really are people along this line that think I'm clever. I haven't judgment enough to operate a trolley car. It's a shame to take the money they give me for running this system, Gordon. Hanged if I didn't think that fellow was too soft." He called the

unknown at the time, but destined within a few years to be scattered far and wide as constructionists with records made in the rebuilding operations through the Rocky mountains, none was less likely to attract attention than McCloud. Bucks, who, indeed, could hardly be reckoned so much of the company as its head, was a man of commanding proportions physically. Like Glover, Bucks was a giant in stature, and the two men, when together, could nowhere escape notice; they looked, in a word, their part, fitted to cope with the tremendous undertakings that had fallen to their lot. Callahan, the chess-player on the Overland line, the man who could hold large combinations of traffic movement constantly in his head and by intuition reach the result of a given problem before other men could work it out, was, like Morris Blood, the master of tonnage, of middle age. But McCloud, when he went to the mountain division, in youthfulness of features was boyish, and when he left he was still a boy, bronzed, but young of face in spite of a lifetime's pressure and worry crowded into three years. He himself counted this physical make-up as a disadvantage. "It has embroiled me in no end of trouble, because I couldn't convince men I was in earnest until I made good in some hard way," he complained once to Whispering Smith. "I never could acquire even a successful habit of swearing, so I had to learn to fight."

When, one day in Honey street in Medicine Bend, he threw open the door of Marion Sinclair's shop, flung his hat sailing along the show case with his war cry, and called to her in the back rooms, she thought he had merely run in to say he was in town.

"How do you do? What do you think? You're going to have an old boarder back," he cried. "I'm coming to Medicine Bend, superintendent of the division!"

"Mr. McCloud!" Marion Sinclair clasped her hands and dropped into a chair. "Have they made you superintendent already?"

"Well, I like that! Do you want them to wait till I'm gray-headed?"

Marion threw her hands to her own head. "Oh, don't say anything about gray hairs. My head won't bear inspection. But I can't get over this promotion coming so soon—this whole big division! Well, I congratulate you very sincerely."

"Oh, but that isn't it! I suppose anybody will congratulate me. But where am I to board? Have you a cook? You know how I went from bad to worse after you left Cold Springs. May I have my meals here with you as I used to there?"

They laughed as they bantered. Marion Sinclair wore gold spectacles, but they did not hide the delightful good-nature in her eyes. On the third finger of her slender left hand she wore, too, a gold band that explained the gray in her hair at 26.

This was the wife of Murray Sinclair, whom he had brought to the mountains from her far-away Wisconsin home. Within a year he had broken her heart so far as it lay in him to do it, but he could not break her charm nor her spirit. She was too proud to go back, when forced to leave him, and had set about earning her own living in the country to which she had come as a bride. She put on spectacles, she mutilated her heavy brown hair and to escape notice and secure the obscurity that she craved, her name, Marion, became, over the door of her millinery shop and in her business, only "M. Sinclair."

Cold Springs, where Sinclair had first brought her when he had headquarters there as foreman of bridges, had proved a hopeless place for the millinery business—at least, in the way that Marion ran it. She could, however, cook extraordinarily well, and with the aid of a servant-maid, could always provide for a boarder or two—perhaps a railroad man or a mine superintendent to whom she could serve meals, and who, like all mountain men, were more than generous in their accounting with women.

Among these standbys of hers was McCloud. McCloud had always been her friend, and when she left Cold Springs and moved to Medicine Bend to set up her little shop in Boney street near Fort, she had lost him. Yet, somehow, to compensate Marion for other cruel things in the mountains, Providence seemed to raise up a new friend for her wherever she went. In Medicine Bend she did not know a soul, but almost the first customer that walked into her shop—and she was a customer worth while—was Dickie Dunning of the Crawling Stone.

CHAPTER V.

The Crawling Stone.

The valley of Crawling Stone river marked for more than a decade the dead line between the overland route of the white man and the last country of the Sioux. It was long after the building of the first line before even an engineer's reconnaissance was made in the Crawling Stone country. Then, within ten years, three surveys were made, two on the north side of

the river and one on the south side by interests seeking a coast outlet. Three reports made in this way gave varying estimates of the expense of putting a line through the valley, but the three coincided in this, that the cost would be prohibitive. Engineers of reputation had in this respect agreed, but Glover, who looked after such work for Bucks, remained unconvinced, and before McCloud was put into the operating department on the Short Line he was asked by Glover to run a preliminary up Crawling Stone valley. Before the date of his report the conclusions reached by other engineers had stood unchallenged.

The valley was not unknown to McCloud. His first year in the mountains, in which, fitted as thoroughly as he could fit himself for his profession, he had come west and found himself unable to get work, had been spent hunting, fishing, and wandering, often cold and often hungry, in the upper, Crawling Stone country. The valley in itself offers to a constructionist no insuperable obstacles; the difficulty is presented in the canyon where the river bursts through the Elbow mountains. South of this canyon, McCloud, one day on a hunting trip, found himself with two Indians pocketed in the rough country, and was planning how to escape passing a night away from camp when his companions led him past a vertical wall of rock 1,000 feet high, split into a narrow defile down which they rode, as it broadened out, for miles. They emerged upon an open country that led without a break into the valley of the Crawling Stone below the canyon. Afterward, when he had become a railroad man, McCloud, sitting at a campfire with Glover and Morris Blood, heard them discussing the coveted and impossible line up the valley. He had been taken into the circle of constructionists and was told of the earlier reports against the line. He thought he knew something about the Elbow mountains, and disputed the findings, offering in two days' ride to take the men before him to the pass called by the Indians the Box, and to take them through it. Glover called it a find, and a big one, and though more immediate matters in the strategy of territorial control then came before him, the preliminary was ordered and McCloud's findings were approved. McCloud himself was soon afterward engrossed in the problems of operating the mountain division; but the dream of his life was to build the Crawling Stone line with a maximum grade of eight tenths through the Box.

The prettiest stretch of Crawling Stone valley lies within 20 miles of Medicine Bend. There it lies widest, and has the pick of water and grass between Medicine Bend and the Mission mountains. Cattlemen went into the Crawling Stone country before the Indians had wholly left it. The first house in the valley was the Stone ranch, built by Richard Dunning, and it still stands overlooking the town of Dunning at the junction of the Frenchman creek and the Crawling Stone. The Frenchman is fed by unfailing springs, and when by summer sun and wind every smaller stream in the middle basin has been licked dry, the Frenchman runs gold and swift between its russet hills. Richard Dunning, being on the border of the Indian country, built for his ranch house a rambling stone fortress. He had chosen, it afterward proved, the choice spot in the valley, and he stocked it with cattle when rearlings could be picked up in Medicine Bend at ten dollars a head. He got together a great body of valley land when it could be had for the asking, and became the rich man of the Long Range.

The Dunnings were Kentuckians. Richard was a bridge engineer and builder, and under Brodie built some of the first bridges on the mountain division, notably the great wooden bridge at Smoky creek. Richard brought out his nephew, Lance Dunning. He taught Lance bridge-building, and as a cowboy on the Stone ranch, learned bridge-building from Richard Dunning. The Dunnings both came west, though at different times, as young men and unmarried, and as far as western women were concerned, might always have remained so. But a Kentucky cousin, Betty, one of the Fairfield Dunnings, related to Richard within the sixth or eighth degree, came to the mountains for her health. Betty's mother had brought Richard up as a boy, and Betty, when he left Fairfield, was a baby. But Dick—as they knew him at home—and the mother wrote back and forth, and he persuaded her to send Betty out for a trip, promising he would send her back in a year a well woman.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ugasmathetic.

Mrs. Malaprop—Young Sharp will have to apologize before I'll speak to him again."

Miss Interest—Did he insult you? Mrs. Malaprop—Did he? The last time I met him I told him that my uncle, Lord de Style, had locomotive stacks, and he had the impudence to ask if he "whistled at crossings." He's an unapologetic brute.



"I'm Coming to Medicine Bend, Superintendent!"